

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 16, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

I am writing in regard to the ruling to open the Canadian border for beef and cattle trade on March 7. Given that critical issues surrounding Canada's beef and cattle industry remain unresolved, I urge you not to lift the trade ban until we are certain that Canadian beef and cattle pose no health risks to our consumers.

We are faced with ongoing concerns about Canada's adherence to the ruminant-to-ruminant feed ban. If we can't be certain that Canada's cattle feed is free of BSE contaminated products, we cannot guarantee that Canada's beef cattle will be free of BSE. It makes no sense to open the Canadian border for beef and cattle trade on March 7, when a key report from USDA experts on this issue isn't due until the end of March.

In addition, I am concerned about our ability to track imported animals once they've entered into the United States. I know that you are working hard to implement a national ID system. At this point, however, the program is not up and running. Without a national ID tracking system it will be impossible to track the individual cattle that are imported from Canada. This was a key weakness identified in the aftermath of our first BSE case. The implementation of a national ID system is a crucial part of guaranteeing the health and safety of our consumers if a similar incident occurs.

I understand how important re-opening international beef and cattle trade is to the U.S. agricultural sector. While I support re-establishing trade with important partners such as Canada and Japan, our first priority must be to protect our consumers. With this in mind, I cannot support resumption of trade with Canada until all issues surrounding cattle feed and are resolved. In addition, I would like to see assurances that imported live animals from Canada can be tracked once they arrive in the United States.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate

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